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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KAMPALA 000347

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SUBJECT: UGANDA/DRC: KONY'S DOCTOR ESCAPES, DISCUSSES OLT

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¶1. Summary: The following is the account of Kotto Kpenze, a Central African Republic (CAR) abductee, who served as Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) leader Joseph Kony's "doctor" for the past year. Kpenze escaped from the LRA on March 30 near Sakure, a village on the border between Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the interview, Kpenze describes Kony's eccentricities and the appalling atrocities against civilians committed by the LRA over the past year. He also describes life in the bush as difficult after the launch of Operation Lightning Thunder (OLT) in mid-December 2008. He recounts being "constantly on the move" because Ugandan Peoples Defense Forces (UPDF) soldiers "were hot on our heels." He describes the decision to withdraw Ugandan forces as "bad news for the population" because the Congolese army "is not doing much to fight the rebels" and the LRA is not afraid of them. Kpenze also confirms the lack of contact between Kony and his deputy, Okot Odhiambo. Finally, Kpwenze says that Kony has survived through his instincts and the use of diversionary tactics, such as sending small groups out in different directions to divert the attention of his pursuers. End Summary.

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BACKGROUND  
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¶2. The following is the New Vision interview of Katto Kpenze that ran on April 6. Begin text:

Up to a year ago, Katto Kpenze was an ordinary medical assistant at Obu Hospital in the Central African Republic. His life changed dramatically on the night of March 6, 2008, when LRA rebels broke into his house and abducted him. He became the personal doctor of LRA leader Joseph Kony. The 45-year old man narrates his one-year ordeal in the LRA camp to Els de Temmerman.

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HIS OWN AND OTHER ABDUCTIONS  
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¶3. Q: What happened when you were abducted?

A: It was around 2:00 a.m. I was sleeping in my house in the town of Obu. Suddenly, somebody kicked open the door and armed men entered. They were a big group, both children and adults. I was still in my hospital uniform. When they noticed I was a medical person, they told me they had a sick person with them and needed my help to treat him. I later discovered it was a lie. I was taken into the Congolese jungle and we walked for one month and two weeks.

14. Q: What did you witness on the way?

A: There was no food. The rebels would attack Congolese homesteads and loot food—mainly maize, cassava, groundnuts, chicken and goats. They also stole medicine from health centers. In every village we passed, they would abduct children and kill adults. They would tie their hands behind their backs and beat them on the head with wooden logs.

15. Q: How many people did you witness being killed?

A: They were many. It is hard to tell. I would say hundreds. Killing was like a routine thing for them.

16. Q: How many children were abducted during that journey?

A: About 400, mostly Congolese.

17. Q: Where did the journey end?

A: After six weeks, we reached Kony's base in Garamba. There were three camps at the time. One was called Kiswahili, the second Eskimoma and the third Cova. I was introduced to Kony and he told me I would be his personal doctor. For 12 months, I was all the time with him.

18. Q: Is he healthy?

A: He is generally in good health. He had malaria a few times. But he regularly suffers attacks as a result of tension. That bothers him the most. Whenever he received shocking news, he would collapse on the floor and I had to treat him with modern and traditional medicine.

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OPERATION LIGHTNING THUNDER  
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19. Q: Where were you when Operation Lightning Thunder started?

A: I was in Kiswahili when the camp was bombed. In fact, Kony had warned us of an imminent attack. The previous day, he called his commanders and told them there would be an offensive and they should be prepared. The planes came at around 9:00 a.m. the next morning. They were four. When we heard the sound of the planes, everybody took off. Kony ran into the thick forest. I ran along with him. We ran almost non-stop for three days.

110. Q: How many were you?

A: At first we were around 300. After about one month, we reached a position where another group joined us and numbers went up to 1800.

111. Q: Were many in your group killed during the joint offensive?

A: Not many died as a result of the aerial bombardments. Most were killed in the ground offensive. In our group, about 18 were killed and 30 wounded. Others escaped or were rescued.

112. Q: What was the impact of the operation?

A: We were constantly on the move. UPDF soldiers were hot on our heels. They were close to us all the time. Whenever we moved, we would run into them. As a result, we could not settle down or rest. We would eat at midnight and rest for two to three hours before starting to move again.

113. Q: What in your opinion is Kony fighting for?

A: In one of the meetings with his commanders, he said he wanted to return to Uganda and overthrow the Government, but at the moment, the roads were blocked by soldiers. That's why we were still in

Congo. He repeated time and again that he would never cease until he is the President of Uganda.

¶14. Q: Did all the orders come from him?

A: Kony gives the orders, but it is Dominic Ongwen who executes them. He is one of the cruelest commanders. Kony would say: "whoever doesn't walk fast must be eliminated." He even ordered the killing of babies born in captivity because they were sick and crying at night. The baby would be hit once with a wooden log and thrown away.

¶15. Q: Is it true that Okot Odhiambo wanted to surrender with his fighters?

A: Odhiambo was no longer with us. In December 2008, after the joint military offensive had started, Kony called his commanders for a meeting. There were a lot of aerial bombardments and attacks by ground troops. But Odhiambo, who was leading a smaller group, presumed to be behind us, did not show up for the meeting. Up to the day I escaped, Kony had not been able to establish contact with Odhiambo and he did not know his location.

¶16. Q: How many other LRA groups are there?

A: Besides Odhiambo's group, there are two smaller groups believed to be further down, near Faradje. One is led by Oket and the other by Arop. They, too, failed to make it for the December 2008 meeting.

¶17. Q: Can you tell us chronologically what happened after the offensive started?

A: From our bases in Garamba, we first took the Nabanga route, moving northwards. Then we branched to Duru where we settled in a small village after the rebels killed its inhabitants. We occupied that village briefly. From Duru, we marched westwards, in the direction of the CAR. There we established a new base in the Congolese jungle, called Nigeria. We would move away for a couple of nights, but always returned to Nigeria. We stayed in thick forest and avoided homesteads since UPDF soldiers were passing through villages day and night.

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¶18. Q: You have a scar on your forehead. Did you get wounded?

A: During one attack, when we were running, a bullet hit me on the head. It was on February 22 and we were hit near Bitima. Thanks to God the bullet didn't penetrate.

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LRA RE-SUPPLY  
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¶19. Q: Is Kony still receiving supplies?

A: We had a lot of food in Garamba before the attack. We had cultivated maize, groundnuts and cassava. And we had bags of food donated by Caritas. We received our last supplies of food and medicines from Caritas in December 2008. The items were handed over to us in Nabanga. I personally received the medicines.

¶20. Q: What about arms and ammunition? There are reports that the Khartoum Government is still arming LRA.

A: I can't say that I saw any airdrops by the Khartoum government or anybody else. I only know that Kony on December 25, 2008 ordered his troops to collect arms and ammunition from Faradje. The rebels had attacked and looted an arms depot of the Congolese army. They stole a lot of guns - all Kalashnikovs - and three boxes of ammunition.

¶21. Q: How did you escape?

A: We were staying at Sakure. One of the commanders had been hit

by a bullet in the leg. He was crying at night. Kony feared it would alarm the enemy. He told me to hide him in the bush some distance away. I had to treat him from there. That is when I ran away.

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OLT PHASE II  
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122. Q: What do you think of Kabila's decision to order the UPDF out of Congo?

A: The withdrawal of the UPDF is bad news for the population. The Congolese army is not doing much to fight the rebels. The LRA are not afraid of them. They fear the UPDF and the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) because they keep pursuing them and never retreat.

123. Q: How do you explain the fact that Kony has survived in the bush this long?

A: He knows the forest through and through. He is highly mobile. And he senses danger from far. He also uses diversionary tactics. He would send small groups of rebels in different directions to divert the attention of his pursuers. These units would then be attacked, while Kony would be in the middle and safe. He has a unique survival instinct, like that of a hunted animal. End Text.

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COMMENT  
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124. Kony's "doctor's" account of OLT tracks closely with that of the UPDF and other Kampala-based sources. We note that his description of life on the run from the UPDF sounds similar to Angolan operations against Jonas Savimbi, which ultimately succeeded. UN Special Envoy for LRA-Affected Areas Joachim Chissano has relayed to us and President Museveni that this type of military pressure is required to force Kony to sign the peace agreement or to eliminate the LRA as a threat to the region.  
BROWNING